IMPACT OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT: A CASE STUDY OF BAGHMARA BLOCK, DHANBAD

SYNOPSIS

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Introduction:

India has a rich tradition of democracy dating back to the 6th century BCE, with Vaishali being recognized as the earliest republic in history (Know More about Vaishali, the world's first republic, 2019). There's a variety of evidence that proves that India had vibrant local self-government even under various monarchies. After the British occupation of India, this tremendous culture of local government and democracy came to its demise. The colonial powers viciously uprooted this governance structure by terming it inefficient and mal-administrative.

Freedom struggle revived the hope for the local government and grassroots democracy due to some charismatic and democratic leaders. The father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi, strongly supported the revival of the local governance structures (Rathi, n.d.). After the independence of India, observing the menace of partition and linguistic struggles, leaders chose to avoid any grassroots decentralisation of powers. The colonial consciousness remained in the memories, and local government was termed inefficient by the leaders of independent India.

The Indian Constitution's guiding principles of state policy include local government. The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments also as the Constitution of India represented cornerstone. The local self-government gained its constitutional status, and delegation of authority was mandated through legal support. It is a fact that two-thirds of the Panchayat head seats are exclusively reserved for women under the 73rd amendment to the Constitution. The given step was quite drastic and had significant consequences for the advancement of women. The research work proposed below is aimed at examining the involvement of women in local self-government and its influence on local policies, decisions, and the empowerment of women through political engagement. The proposed research will be carried out in the Baghmara block of the Dhanbad district in Jharkhand.

None of the conducted studies have explored the involvement of women in the Baghmara block within the local government. The block of Baghmara in the district of Dhanbad has a population of 334,309 with a literacy rate of 74.9 per cent, according to Census, 2011. The sex ratio stands at 905, which is below the national average of 943 (Baghmara, 2011). The Block of Baghmara has 227 villages with 61 panchayats. Mesmerizingly, out of these 61 panchayats, 34 were won by women Mukhiyas in the general panchayat elections of 2022 (Results of Panchayat Election, 2022). Enhancing the status of women in social, economic, and political spheres is a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development and ensuring

transparent governance. According to a 1995 report from the Fourth World Conference on Women of the United Nations, women hold only 10% of seats in legislative bodies globally (The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995).

Women's advancement in local government requires the creation of social, economic and political conditions that facilitate their political participation (Mohanty, 1995). Women's participation in local government is beneficial for the improvement of local decision-making and policy formation. Matilda Smith (1995) reported in her paper that it is an undeniable fact that women are the perfect fit for local government as they possess the unique ability to efficiently identify and prioritize local needs, especially when it comes to advancing women's participation in all spheres of life.

The socio-economic advancement of women remained far behind despite the reservation in local bodies. The prevailing political ideology and mindset among the local populace as well as the patriarchal nature of society are major factors that contribute to the confinement of women in household roles. This hinders their ability to function as public leaders, particularly in the role of Panchayat head. The primary reason why male members of a household, particularly husbands, tend to take on the responsibilities of the Panchayat head on behalf of the elected female head is due to patriarchal attitudes.

Review of Literature

Shaul (1982), in her paper *"The Status of Women in Local Governments",* The author argues that once women have equal political power, they will have more opportunities to support the needs of society and develop their unique talents. So, it helps for the better the society. It is the author's firm belief that having more women in politics will make society more diverse and inclusive, ensuring that the interests of all members, not just the dominant group, are reflected.

D'Lima (1983), in her work *"Women in Local Government: A Study of Maharashtra*", The research has unequivocally demonstrated that several women were elected solely due to the pressure exerted by their husbands or influential politicians. Moreover, a staggering 58% of the women who were elected could not actively participate in the crucial decision-making process of the panchayat. This highlights the pressing need to address the issue of gender inequality in the political landscape in the PRIs. Only 42% of them were active in their political domain and served the entitled task. Her study displays the correlation between the social development of women and their political participation in local self-government. It also

provided a broad road map for critical analysis of women's impact on the local self-government.

In a seminal book *"Women in Panchayati Raj Structures"*, Manikyamba (1989), examined how women are by far the most institutionally backward, socially disadvantaged, and socially marginalised cluster in rural society. The author believes that the government's efforts to revitalise democratic decentralisation at the local scale are just a focus on increasing women's participation in decision-making.

Kaushik (1993), in her work *"Women and Panchayati Raj",* identifies the various points because women are not actively mobilising to participate in public life. These are the increase in crimes against women, rape, sexual assault, dowry burning, and sati murder are challenged to affect women's contribution to the local self-government.

Smith (1995), analyses the women's role in local governance in *"Women Better Placed for Local Government",* As per the author, even after women hold some decision-making positions, their figure is still relatively small. The author further writes about the proximity between women and social issues concerning any particular place. It is an undeniable fact that women possess an unparalleled sense of community and are exceptionally skilled at identifying local governance problems.

Jain (1996), in her paper "*Panchayat Raj: Women Changing Governance",* found that the enactment of the Panchayati Raj Institution in India has had a profound impact on the transformation of women. Women leaders, in particular, have experienced a significant increase in their self-confidence, empowerment, and self-perception. The reservation of seats for women in rural governing bodies has not only provided them with a unique opportunity to showcase their leadership abilities but also to address other demands with utmost efficiency. Now, in modern times, women have challenged the traditional idea of male-dominated authority and supremacy.

Jharta (1996), in her book *"Women and Politics in India: Impact of Family and Education on Women Political Activists",* the author examines the active involvement of family and education in women's political participation in the region of Himachal Pradesh. The author examines the women's decision-making roles and their relation to local self-government.

Women's Equality in India: A Myth Or Reality?", by Devi (2000) offers an objection regarding the claim that women have an equal social and economic status under the current

legislative framework. However, the gap between theory and practice remains large. Women's social, political and economic progress has been sluggish despite progress in society. The author asserts that social change has rapidly taken place in society, yet women have been neglected in this process. Despite employing various legal and legislative means, the situation for her (women) stays unsatisfactory.

Swers (2001), in her study *"Understanding the Policy Impact of Electing Women",* found that females elected to state legislatures have differentiated policy priorities, especially concerning women's issues. Their legislation incorporates issues typically of concern to women, including welfare, health, and education. As per the author, women possess a unique perspective on their representational role. Female legislators expressed a sense of civic duty to represent women's interests than male counterparts.

Kumar (2002), in her paper *"Women in Political Decision-Making",* asserts that the theoretical patterns explain the conditioning behind the underrepresentation of women in the decision-making spare. Women's representation in politics and policymaking is woefully lacking. This refers to the entire gender and state discussion. Women have improved the importance of their spaces in local activism, peace movements, welfare programs and many more areas.

Mandal (2003), in his comprehensive book *"Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions",* emphasised that women's engagement in local governance has allowed them to become strong leaders and act as catalysts for social change. Women leaders inspired other women to be more assertive and confident. The author argues that women's participation stimulated various panchayat reforms.

In the work "*Women in Panchayati Raj*", Singh (2005), examined the various factors that discourage women's engagement in local self-government. The criminalisation of politics, lack of safety, illiteracy, ignorance, absence of training, and unawareness about politics are the major reasons. The author also points out the social factors such as education and social hierarchies as crucial issues in women's success in politics.

Jayal (2006), in her paper *"Engendering local democracy: The Impact of Quotas for Women in India's Panchayats",* discusses the social and financial characteristics of elected women's representatives in panchayats. The author evaluates the range of studies available to identify various catalysts of women's representation, such as age, literacy, caste, income, etc. The study also explores women's participation in local governing bodies and the institutional

and social obstacles attached to such participation. The paper focuses on various dimensions of women's participation and their exclusion from local governments. The author examines women's quota-based reservations and their impact on local self-governance.

Ambedkar & Ambedkar (2006), in their work *"Role of Women in Panchayati Raj."* point out that the seventy-third constitutional amendment was implemented in the hopes that it would improve governance and give more opportunities to women more political participation. Women making up a sizable portion of Panchayati Raj institutions will increase the PRIs' efficiency, honesty, discipline, and responsibility in addition to increasing their representation in society. In this work, the author examines the perceptions of female head Panchayati Raj members regarding a variety of topics involving Panchayati Raj institutions.

Waseem et al. (2008), in their paper *"Women's Political Participation And Changing Pattern of Leadership in Rural Areas of U.P.*", discuss that female leaders are integral to the functioning of the Panchayati Raj system, but this is still just a far-off fantasy. All members of society can relate to this, but rural women who must adhere to tradition and culture may find it to be even more relevant. Caste, age, religion, and other factors are the main determinants of whether or not women can take part in governance. Due to their higher rate of mobility and exposure to the outside world, lower caste women massively participated in the panchayat's activities as gram Sabha members, zila parishad members and Pradhans.

Khanna (2009), in her *"Political Participation of Women in India",* stated that women can redefine political priorities. They can change the political agenda that addresses gender-specific issues and offer a fresh perspective on mainstream political matters.

In a paper titled *"Didi" of Rural Bihar: Real Agent of Change?",* Tiwari (2010) examined the JeeVika organization in the state of Bihar and its functions. Since 2007, the state-run JeeVika organization for women's self-help has been functioning in Bihar. Based on primary research, this emphasizes the rural woman as an individual, or "*didi"*, as having the potential for long-term poverty reduction in rural Bihar.

Panda (2015), in her paper *"Role of Women in Rural Development in the State of Odisha Through Gram Sabha: an Overview",* claimed that when female participation is active in decision-making, corruption and resource misuse automatically decrease. The entire community needs to participate much more actively in the Gram Sabha, which is the lifeblood of local government because it directly represents citizen's opinions and voices. In rural development, women can have a significant and transformative impact.

O'Neil et al. (2015), in their paper *"The Power to Decide: Women, Decision-Making and Gender Equality",* examined women's capacity in different spheres of decision-making. As per the authors, women must draw on various capabilities to take advantage of institutional and structural opportunities. Especially in the share of local self-government.

In a study *"Greater Political Representation for Women",* by Kasturi (2016), the author mentions the women's reservation in local government and its inadequacy in empowering women. The paper traces a history of women's struggle for rights and representation. The study also emphasises that only the reservation in all elected bodies can bring women's issues into public policy and decision-making.

Haug et al. (2019), in their paper "*Attitudes Towards Women's Participation in Local Politics in South Asia"*, the study was conducted through a survey of specific districts of all three countries. The central objective was to examine the people's perception towards women's political participation and their assertion of rights. The paper highlighted three dimensions of the general regarding women's public involvement. These were (1) Women's capacities for external participation, (2) Family reputation, and (3) Domestic responsibilities.

Statement of the Problem:

The district of Dhanbad has been severely impacted by the resource curse, resulting in sluggish socio-economic and political development for its residents. It is a fact that the region of Baghmara, despite its significant coal mines and washeries, has been unjustly ignored in literature. The gradual rise in women's contribution to the panchayat elections uncovers new hopes for the enabling of females in the section. The study explores women's experience of the elections and their perspectives on the priorities of the Panchayats requires immediate and rigorous research work in the area.

Research Objectives:

The present study will focus on the following objectives.

- To trace the political experience and political attitudes of the Panchayat heads.
- To assess the role of the female heads of Panchayats on women's education in the localities.
- To examine the success of the reservation of seats and representation of women through the 73rd constitutional amendment in the Block of Baghmara.

- To explore the relation between the political participation of the female Mukhiyas and their socio-economic status.
- To find the impact of women's involvement in the local government has on women's safety and security.

Research Questions:

The central question the following research aims to answer is the impact of women's participation in local electoral politics on the decision-making, priorities setting, policy formation and overall governance of the local bodies in the block of Baghmara.

- How does the political experience of the Panchayat heads shape their attitude toward politics?
- What is the role of the female heads of Panchayats on women's education in the localities?
- What policy perspectives do women heads of panchayats hold towards sanitation and cleanliness?
- How does the political involvement of the female Mukhiyas improve their socio-economic status?
- What impact does women's contribution in the local government have on women's safety and security?
- How successful was the reservation of seats and representation of women through the 73rd constitutional amendment in the block of Baghmara?

Research methodology:

The proposed research shall adopt the mixed method of quantitative and qualitative research. The research will employ quantitative methods to effectively collect data by surveying Mukhiyas. Moreover, online governmental sites will be utilized to extract data that will determine the current level of women's involvement in local bodies. The study will meticulously analyse the impact of decision-making and local policy on governance by thoroughly assessing the outputs and results of such actions.

Qualitative methods shall be used in interviews of mukhiyas selected through random sampling about their experience of electoral politics and the challenges they faced. The researcher shall also include case study methods in the proposed research work.

Primary data will be collected from direct interviews, reports of government institutions, non-governmental organisations (national and international), census data, and election commissions. The researcher will procure secondary data from diverse sources such as books, journals, newspapers, websites, and digital archives.

Significance of the Research:

The significance of the proposed research resides in the novel objective of the research, as it aims to evaluate the influence of women's political engagement on local governance. As the block of Baghmara has largely been unexplored regarding the women's contribution to the local government, this necessitates the researcher to conduct and base his study on the region. The Baghmara block has witnessed a remarkable increase in the number of women holding the position of Mukhiya. A thorough investigation into the area will reveal the underlying causes and powerful forces behind such growth. The outcome of this research will serve as a valuable resource to offer progressive recommendations for elevating women's input not just in Baghmara but in other areas as well. The growth of women's political participation requires us to enquire about their experience of struggles and challenges, which shall be the focus area of the proposed research.

Limitations of the research:

The proposed research may encounter the following limitations. The work is designed to study the block of Baghmara, primarily a rural area under the district of Dhanbad. The rural background of the female panchayat heads may hamper clear communication with the researcher because of large illiteracy and fear of personal information leakage from the researcher's side. The language barrier can also be a hurdle to the data collection through the interviews. The perception of Mukhiyapati and the Patriarchal nature of society may lead to the distortion of data. The researcher may encounter societal resistance while reaching out to the female heads of the panchayats. The researcher's native background in the range can effectively reduce the language barrier and the first limitation of the research. The researcher will try to minimize the third obstacle to the work by providing complete information about the research to the participants. The foremost caution shall be applied to avoid personal predispositions and prejudices in the research as the researcher is a resident of the block of Baghmara. The above-mentioned barrier can be rectified by peer review and regular consultation with the supervisor of the research.

Tentative Chapterization:

The report of the research may contain the following chapter

Introduction

Chapter 1. Historical Background of the Local Self-Government

Chapter 2. Women's Participation in Local Self-Government of India

Chapter 3. Role of women in Local Self-Government of Jharkhand

Chapter 4. Local Self-Government in Baghmara Block of Dhanbad

Chapter 5. Impact of Women's Participation in Local Self-Government of Baghmara Block

Conclusion

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